

Moral Emblems

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By Robert Louis Stevenson

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NOT I, AND OTHER POEMS

Poem: NOT I

Some like drink
In a pint pot,
Some like to think;
Some not.

Strong Dutch cheese,
Old Kentucky rye,
Some like these;
Not I.

Some like Poe,
And others like Scott,
Some like Mrs. Stowe;
Some not.

Some like to laugh,
Some like to cry,
Some like chaff;
Not I.

Poem: II

Here, perfect to a wish,
We offer, not a dish,
But just the platter:
A book that's not a book,
A pamphlet in the look
But not the matter.

I own in disarray:
As to the flowers of May
The frosts of Winter;
To my poetic rage,
The smallness of the page
And of the printer.

Poem: III

As seamen on the seas
With song and dance descry
Adown the morning breeze
An islet in the sky:
In Araby the dry,
As o'er the sandy plain
The panting camels cry
To smell the coming rain:

So all things over earth
A common law obey,
And rarity and worth
Pass, arm in arm, away;
And even so, to-day,
The printer and the bard,
In pressless Davos, pray
Their sixpenny reward.

Poem: IV

The pamphlet here presented
Was planned and printed by
A printer unindented,
A bard whom all decry.

The author and the printer,
With various kinds of skill,
Concocted it in Winter
At Davos on the Hill.

They burned the nightly taper;
But now the work is ripe -
Observe the costly paper,
Remark the perfect type!

MORAL EMBLEMS I

Poem: I

See how the children in the print
Bound on the book to see what's in 't!
O, like these pretty babes, may you
Seize and *apply* this volume too!
And while your eye upon the cuts
With harmless ardour opes and shuts,
Reader, may your immortal mind
To their sage lessons not be blind.

Poem: II

Reader, your soul upraise to see,
In yon fair cut designed by me,
The pauper by the highwayside
Vainly soliciting from pride.
Mark how the Beau with easy air
Contemns the anxious rustic's prayer,
And, casting a disdainful eye,
Goes gaily gallivanting by.
He from the poor averts his head . . .
He will regret it when he's dead.

Poem: III - A PEAK IN DARIEN

Broad-gazing on untrodden lands,
See where adventurous Cortez stands;
While in the heavens above his head
The Eagle seeks its daily bread.
How aptly fact to fact replies:
Heroes and eagles, hills and skies.
Ye who contemn the fatted slave
Look on this emblem, and be brave.

Poem: IV

See in the print how, moved by whim,
Trumpeting Jumbo, great and grim,
Adjusts his trunk, like a cravat,
To noose that individual's hat.
The sacred Ibis in the distance
Joys to observe his bold resistance.

Poem: V

Mark, printed on the opposing page,
The unfortunate effects of rage.
A man (who might be you or me)
Hurls another into the sea.
Poor soul, his unreflecting act
His future joys will much contract,
And he will spoil his evening toddy
By dwelling on that mangled body.

MORAL EMBLEMS II

Poem: I

With storms a-weather, rocks a-lee,
The dancing skiff puts forth to sea.
The lone dissenter in the blast
Recoils before the sight aghast.
But she, although the heavens be black,
Holds on upon the starboard tack,
For why? although to-day she sink,
Still safe she sails in printer's ink,
And though to-day the seamen drown,
My cut shall hand their memory down.

Poem: II

The careful angler chose his nook
At morning by the liliated brook,
And all the noon his rod he plied
By that romantic riverside.
Soon as the evening hours decline
Tranquilly he'll return to dine,
And, breathing forth a pious wish,
Will cram his belly full of fish.

Poem: III

The Abbot for a walk went out,
A wealthy cleric, very stout,
And Robin has that Abbot stuck
As the red hunter spears the buck.
The djavel or the javelin
Has, you observe, gone bravely in,
And you may hear that weapon whack
Bang through the middle of his back.
*Hence we may learn that Abbots should
Never go walking in a wood.*

Poem: IV

The frozen peaks he once explored,
But now he's dead and by the board.
How better far at home to have stayed
Attended by the parlour maid,
And warmed his knees before the fire
Until the hour when folks retire!
*So, if you would be spared to friends,
Do nothing but for business ends.*

Poem: V

Industrious pirate! see him sweep
The lonely bosom of the deep,
And daily the horizon scan
From Hatteras or Matapan.
Be sure, before that pirate's old,
He will have made a pot of gold,
And will retire from all his labours
And be respected by his neighbours.
*You also scan your life's horizon
For all that you can clap your eyes on.*

A MARTIAL ELEGY FOR SOME LEAD SOLDIERS

For certain soldiers lately dead
Our reverent dirge shall here be said.
Them, when their martial leader called,
No dread preparative appalled;
But leaden-hearted, leaden-heeled,
I marked them steadfast in the field.
Death grimly sided with the foe,
And smote each leaden hero low.
Proudly they perished one by one:
The dread Pea-cannon's work was done!
O not for them the tears we shed,
Consigned to their congenial lead;
But while unmoved their sleep they take,
We mourn for their dear Captain's sake,
For their dear Captain, who shall smart
Both in his pocket and his heart,
Who saw his heroes shed their gore,
And lacked a shilling to buy more!

THE GRAVER THE PEN: OR, SCENES FROM NATURE, WITH APPROPRIATE VERSES

Poem: I - PROEM

Unlike the common run of men,
I wield a double power to please,
And use the GRAVER and the PEN
With equal aptitude and ease.

I move with that illustrious crew,
The ambidextrous Kings of Art;
And every mortal thing I do
Brings ringing money in the mart.

Hence, in the morning hour, the mead,
The forest and the stream perceive
Me wandering as the muses lead -
Or back returning in the eve.

Two muses like two maiden aunts,
The engraving and the singing muse,
Follow, through all my favourite haunts,
My devious traces in the dews.

To guide and cheer me, each attends;
Each speeds my rapid task along;
One to my cuts her ardour lends,
One breathes her magic in my song.

Poem: II - THE PRECARIOUS MILL

Alone above the stream it stands,
Above the iron hill,
The topsy-turvy, tumble-down,
Yet habitable mill.

Still as the ringing saws advance
To slice the humming deal,
All day the pallid miller hears
The thunder of the wheel.

He hears the river plunge and roar
As roars the angry mob;
He feels the solid building quake,
The trusty timbers throb.

All night beside the fire he cowers:
He hears the rafters jar:
O why is he not in a proper house
As decent people are!

The floors are all aslant, he sees,
The doors are all a-jam;
And from the hook above his head
All crooked swings the ham.

‘Alas,’ he cries and shakes his head,
‘I see by every sign,
There soon all be the deuce to pay,
With this estate of mine.’

Poem: III - THE DISPUTATIOUS PINES

The first pine to the second said:
‘My leaves are black, my branches red;
I stand upon this moor of mine,
A hoar, unconquerable pine.’

The second sniffed and answered: ‘Pooh!
I am as good a pine as you.’

'Discourteous tree,' the first replied,
'The tempest in my boughs had cried,
The hunter slumbered in my shade,
A hundred years ere you were made.'

The second smiled as he returned:
'I shall be here when you are burned.'

So far dissension ruled the pair,
Each turned on each a frowning air,
When flickering from the bank anigh,
A flight of martens met their eye.
Sometime their course they watched; and then -
They nodded off to sleep again.

Poem: IV - THE TRAMPS

Now long enough had day endured,
Or King Apollo Palinured,
Seaward he steers his panting team,
And casts on earth his latest gleam.

But see! the Tramps with jaded eye
Their destined provinces espy.
Long through the hills their way they took,
Long camped beside the mountain brook;
'Tis over; now with rising hope
They pause upon the downward slope,
And as their aching bones they rest,
Their anxious captain scans the west.

So paused Alaric on the Alps
And ciphered up the Roman scalps.

Poem: V - THE FOOLHARDY GEOGRAPHER

The howling desert miles around,
The tinkling brook the only sound -

Wearied with all his toils and feats,
The traveller dines on potted meats;
On potted meats and princely wines,
Not wisely but too well he dines.

The brindled Tiger loud may roar,
High may the hovering Vulture soar;
Alas! regardless of them all,
Soon shall the empurpled glutton sprawl -
Soon, in the desert's hushed repose,
Shall trumpet tidings through his nose!
Alack, unwise! that nasal song
Shall be the Ounce's dinner-gong!

A blemish in the cut appears;
Alas! it cost both blood and tears.
The glancing graver swerved aside,
Fast flowed the artist's vital tide!
And now the apologetic bard
Demands indulgence for his pard!

Poem: VI - THE ANGLER AND THE CLOWN

The echoing bridge you here may see,
The pouring lynn, the waving tree,
The eager angler fresh from town -
Above, the contumelious clown.
The angler plies his line and rod,
The clodpole stands with many a nod, -
With many a nod and many a grin,
He sees him cast his engine in.

'What have you caught?' the peasant cries.

'Nothing as yet,' the Fool replies.

MORAL TALES

Poem: I - ROBIN AND BEN: OR, THE PIRATE AND THE APOTHECARY

Come, lend me an attentive ear
A startling moral tale to hear,
Of Pirate Rob and Chemist Ben,
And different destinies of men.

Deep in the greenest of the vales
That nestle near the coast of Wales,
The heaving main but just in view,
Robin and Ben together grew,
Together worked and played the fool,
Together shunned the Sunday school,
And pulled each other's youthful noses
Around the cots, among the roses.

Together but unlike they grew;
Robin was rough, and through and through
Bold, inconsiderate, and manly,
Like some historic Bruce or Stanley.
Ben had a mean and servile soul,
He robbed not, though he often stole.
He sang on Sunday in the choir,
And tamely capped the passing Squire.

At length, intolerant of trammels -
Wild as the wild Bithynian camels,
Wild as the wild sea-eagles - Bob
His widowed dam contrives to rob,
And thus with great originality
Effectuates his personality.
Thenceforth his terror-haunted flight
He follows through the starry night;

And with the early morning breeze,
Behold him on the azure seas.
The master of a trading dandy
Hires Robin for a go of brandy;
And all the happy hills of home
Vanish beyond the fields of foam.

Ben, meanwhile, like a tin reflector,
Attended on the worthy rector;
Opened his eyes and held his breath,
And flattered to the point of death;
And was at last, by that good fairy,
Apprenticed to the Apothecary.

So Ben, while Robin chose to roam,
A rising chemist was at home,
Tended his shop with learnèd air,
Watered his drugs and oiled his hair,
And gave advice to the unwary,
Like any sleek apothecary.

Meanwhile upon the deep afar
Robin the brave was waging war,
With other tarry desperadoes
About the latitude of Barbadoes.
He knew no touch of craven fear;
His voice was thunder in the cheer;
First, from the main-to'-gallan' high,
The skulking merchantmen to spy -
The first to bound upon the deck,
The last to leave the sinking wreck.
His hand was steel, his word was law,
His mates regarded him with awe.
No pirate in the whole profession
Held a more honourable position.

At length, from years of anxious toil,
Bold Robin seeks his native soil;
Wisely arranges his affairs,
And to his native dale repairs.
The Bristol *Swallow* sets him down
Beside the well-remembered town.
He sighs, he spits, he marks the scene,
Proudly he treads the village green;
And, free from pettiness and rancour,
Takes lodgings at the 'Crown and Anchor.'

Strange, when a man so great and good
Once more in his home-country stood,
Strange that the sordid clowns should show
A dull desire to have him go.

His clinging breeks, his tarry hat,
The way he swore, the way he spat,
A certain quality of manner,
Alarming like the pirate's banner -
Something that did not seem to suit all -
Something, O call it bluff, not brutal -
Something at least, howe'er it's called,
Made Robin generally black-balled.

His soul was wounded; proud and glum,
Alone he sat and swigged his rum,
And took a great distaste to men
Till he encountered Chemist Ben.
Bright was the hour and bright the day
That threw them in each other's way;
Glad were their mutual salutations,
Long their respective revelations.
Before the inn in sultry weather
They talked of this and that together;
Ben told the tale of his indentures,
And Rob narrated his adventures.

Last, as the point of greatest weight,
The pair contrasted their estate,
And Robin, like a boastful sailor,
Despised the other for a tailor.

'See,' he remarked, 'with envy, see
A man with such a fist as me!
Bearded and ringed, and big, and brown,
I sit and toss the stingo down.
Hear the gold jingle in my bag -
All won beneath the Jolly Flag!'

Ben moralised and shook his head:
'You wanderers earn and eat your bread.
The foe is found, beats or is beaten,
And, either how, the wage is eaten.
And after all your pully-hauly
Your proceeds look uncommon small-ly.
You had done better here to tarry

Apprentice to the Apothecary.
The silent pirates of the shore
Eat and sleep soft, and pocket more

Than any red, robustious ranger
Who picks his farthings hot from danger.
You clank your guineas on the board;
Mine are with several bankers stored.
You reckon riches on your digits,
You dash in chase of Sals and Bridgets,
You drink and risk delirium tremens,
Your whole estate a common seaman's!
Regard your friend and school companion,
Soon to be wed to Miss Trevanion
(Smooth, honourable, fat and flowery,
With Heaven knows how much land in dowry),
Look at me - Am I in good case?
Look at my hands, look at my face;
Look at the cloth of my apparel;
Try me and test me, lock and barrel;
And own, to give the devil his due,
I have made more of life than you.
Yet I nor sought nor risked a life;
I shudder at an open knife;
The perilous seas I still avoided
And stuck to land whate'er betided.
I had no gold, no marble quarry,
I was a poor apothecary,
Yet here I stand, at thirty-eight,
A man of an assured estate.'

'Well,' answered Robin - 'well, and how?'

The smiling chemist tapped his brow.
'Rob,' he replied, 'this throbbing brain
Still worked and hankered after gain.
By day and night, to work my will,
It pounded like a powder mill;
And marking how the world went round
A theory of theft it found.
Here is the key to right and wrong:
Steal little, but steal all day long;
And this invaluable plan
Marks what is called the Honest Man.
When first I served with Doctor Pill,
My hand was ever in the till.

Now that I am myself a master,
My gains come softer still and faster.
As thus: on Wednesday, a maid
Came to me in the way of trade.
Her mother, an old farmer's wife,
Required a drug to save her life.
'At once, my dear, at once,' I said,
Patted the child upon the head,
Bade her be still a loving daughter,
And filled the bottle up with water.'

'Well, and the mother?' Robin cried.

'O she!' said Ben - 'I think she died.'

'Battle and blood, death and disease,
Upon the tainted Tropic seas -
The attendant sharks that chew the cud -
The abhorred scuppers spouting blood -
The untended dead, the Tropic sun -
The thunder of the murderous gun -
The cut-throat crew - the Captain's curse -
The tempest blustering worse and worse -
These have I known and these can stand,
But you - I settle out of hand!'

Out flashed the cutlass, down went Ben
Dead and rotten, there and then.

Poem: II - THE BUILDER'S DOOM

In eighteen-twenty Deacon Thin
Fou'd the land and fenced it in,
And laid his broad foundations down
About a furlong out of town.

Early and late the work went on.
The carts were toiling ere the dawn;
The mason whistled, the hodman sang;
Early and late the trowels rang;
And Thin himself came day by day

To push the work in every way.
An artful builder, patent king
Of all the local building ring,
Who was there like him in the quarter
For mortifying brick and mortar,
Or pocketing the odd piastre
By substituting lath and plaster?
With plan and two-foot rule in hand,
He by the foreman took his stand,
With boisterous voice, with eagle glance
To stamp upon extravagance.
For thrift of bricks and greed of guilders,
He was the Buonaparte of Builders.

The foreman, a desponding creature,
Demurred to here and there a feature:
'For surely, sir - with your permeession -
Bricks here, sir, in the main parteeition. . . .'
The builder goggled, gulped, and stared,
The foreman's services were spared.
Thin would not count among his minions
A man of Wesleyan opinions.

'Money is money,' so he said.
'Crescents are crescents, trade is trade.
Pharaohs and emperors in their seasons
Built, I believe, for different reasons -
Charity, glory, piety, pride -
To pay the men, to please a bride,
To use their stone, to spite their neighbours,
Not for a profit on their labours.

They built to edify or bewilder;
I build because I am a builder.
Crescent and street and square I build,
Plaster and paint and carve and gild.
Around the city see them stand,
These triumphs of my shaping hand,
With bulging walls, with sinking floors,
With shut, impracticable doors,
Fickle and frail in every part,
And rotten to their inmost heart.
There shall the simple tenant find
Death in the falling window-blind,
Death in the pipe, death in the faucet,
Death in the deadly water-closet!

A day is set for all to die:
Caveat emptor! what care I?

As to Amphion's tuneful kit
Thebes rose, with towers encircling it;
As to the Mage's brandished wand
A spiry palace clove the sand;
To Thin's indomitable financing,
That phantom crescent kept advancing.
When first the brazen bells of churches
Called clerk and parson to their perches,
The worshippers of every sect
Already viewed it with respect;
A second Sunday had not gone
Before the roof was rattled on:
And when the fourth was there, behold
The crescent finished, painted, sold!

The stars proceeded in their courses,
Nature with her subversive forces,
Time, too, the iron-toothed and sinewed,
And the edacious years continued.
Thrones rose and fell; and still the crescent,
Unsanative and now senescent,
A plastered skeleton of lath,
Looked forward to a day of wrath.
In the dead night, the groaning timber
Would jar upon the ear of slumber,
And, like Dodona's talking oak,
Of oracles and judgments spoke.
When to the music fingered well
The feet of children lightly fell,
The sire, who dozed by the decanters,
Started, and dreamed of misadventures.
The rotten brick decayed to dust;
The iron was consumed by rust;
Each tabid and perverted mansion
Hung in the article of declension.

So forty, fifty, sixty passed;
Until, when seventy came at last,
The occupant of number three
Called friends to hold a jubilee.
Wild was the night; the charging rack
Had forced the moon upon her back;
The wind piped up a naval ditty;

And the lamps winked through all the city.
Before that house, where lights were shining,
Corpulent feeders, grossly dining,
And jolly clamour, hum and rattle,
Fairly outvoiced the tempest's battle.
As still his moistened lip he fingered,
The envious policeman lingered;
While far the infernal tempest sped,
And shook the country folks in bed,
And tore the trees and tossed the ships,
He lingered and he licked his lips.
Lo, from within, a hush! the host
Briefly expressed the evening's toast;
And lo, before the lips were dry,
The Deacon rising to reply!
'Here in this house which once I built,
Papered and painted, carved and gilt,
And out of which, to my content,
I netted seventy-five per cent.;
Here at this board of jolly neighbours,
I reap the credit of my labours.
These were the days - I will say more -
These were the grand old days of yore!
The builder laboured day and night;
He watched that every brick was right:

The decent men their utmost did;
And the house rose - a pyramid!
These were the days, our provost knows,
When forty streets and crescents rose,
The fruits of my creative noddle,
All more or less upon a model,
Neat and commodious, cheap and dry,
A perfect pleasure to the eye!
I found this quite a country quarter;
I leave it solid lath and mortar.
In all, I was the single actor -
And am this city's benefactor!
Since then, alas! both thing and name,
Shoddy across the ocean came -
Shoddy that can the eye bewilder
And makes me blush to meet a builder!
Had this good house, in frame or fixture,
Been tempered by the least admixture
Of that discreditable shoddy,
Should we to-day compound our toddy,

Or gaily marry song and laughter
Below its sempiternal rafter?
Not so!' the Deacon cried.

The mansion
Had marked his fatuous expansion.
The years were full, the house was fated,
The rotten structure crepitated!

A moment, and the silent guests
Sat pallid as their dinner vests.
A moment more and, root and branch,
That mansion fell in avalanche,
Story on story, floor on floor,
Roof, wall and window, joist and door,
Dead weight of damnable disaster,
A cataclysm of lath and plaster.

*Siloam did not choose a sinner -
All were not builders at the dinner.*

The End.

